

Bridges

by Whitefang333

Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Drama

Language: English

Characters: Hiccup, Stoick

Status: Completed

Published: 2012-11-07 07:28:36

Updated: 2012-11-07 07:28:36

Packaged: 2016-04-26 14:02:44

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,607

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Gaps between generations. Sometimes deeper than time.

Bridges

"Can ya keep a secret? "

Those words alone told the one hearing them about many things.

They hinted that the one asking had something to share. The questioner expected a positive answer and beneath that coating of nonchalance, he was putting a lot of trust into the one who received the question.

Extremely complicated reasons were usually involved when somebody wanted to share a secret.

Toothless had no interest whatsoever in finding out. He was simply surprised that Stoick the Vast was talking to him.

At the best of times their relationship could be described as "functioning", with a strong stress on F (and that was not an F as in "Friendship").

The dragon, for obvious reasons, did not answer. He only stared idly as the dark-scaled creature tended to do, his enormous pupils surveying the human as he slurped the remaining salmon fish-tail into his mouth, finishing the basket-meal (or, as Hiccup called it, "The Dragon Buffet").

Stoick took a deep breath, enlarging his already enormous chest and exhaled sharply. He distracted himself by throwing a log into the fire. The Fury and the Chieftain were the only ones left in the Haddock household; Hiccup had left for an evening star-gazing session with Astrid.

Star-gazin', was it? Ri-i-i-ght,_ thought Stoick. Not that it mattered at the moment. For some reason the burly man wanted to be selfish for a moment and talk about himself. For a Viking opening up was not a sign of a healthy way of dealing with inner issues. It was selfishness. And a big weakness.

"I never wanted to be like my father", the leader said, quickly and sharply as if the quicker he said it, the better. It was a strategy that usually worked with things like crushing his enemies or getting an arrow tip out of his body.

Toothless licked his lips to get at the remaining taste of the fish.

"Not that I hated my father", Stoick added rapidly for reasons unknown even to him but needing to explain that last sentence. Even if he was talking to a dragon who could not understand him, for Thor's sake!

And his father was long dead, may the gates of Valhalla always be open to him.

"I just...", Stoick sighed, "Well, with Val, it was easy. I knew I was going to marry her ever since I was six years old. Everythin' for me had been planned out by my parents. And I was expected to be a great warrior leader. I knew who I was, I knew who I was to become. I trained...hard. Father used to remind me of my duties with a yell - and with an iron axe handleâ€|"

Father, never Dad or Daddy or even Old Man or Geezer. The only other words he ever used whilst addressing him was Chieftain and Sir.

Stoick suddenly went silent and pressed a hand to his side where he knew he would feel a bulge on his rib. It was a place where the bone had >healed incorrectly after being broken by repeated heavy beatings his father applied. It was his parent's usual remedy for everything he found lacking with his son. Including mistakes.<p>

"I did not question his actions,", Stoick admitted to the fire, Toothless laying comfortably on the other side end of the hearth, "Even when he told me to hit a rock with my head because..."

The unsaid words hung in the air.

He had never told the truth about it to anyone, even to Gobber.

"...because I was afraid of my father, more afraid than of anythin' else in the world."

The blacksmith had not needed to be told this fact, yet somehow Gobber had known and he had supported his friend, nevertheless.

"My father was a respected leader, a great warrior, but-" Stoick stopped speaking again.

.... But it had been so painful to be his child

"...it's not somethin' I wanted for Hiccup to experience," Stoick finally said aloud.

Stoick was a Viking, after all, not used to expressing his emotions, never showing weakness or fear.

Just as his father had taught him.

"He- Father- died soon after Hiccup was born, but when he was still here, I saw him lookin' at my son - my son - with such unnatural glee and plannin' how he was goin' to take over Hiccup's trainin' right after the boy could walk, an' train him, the way he trained me... I - felt - that..., " he withheld speaking his true intentions for the third time.

I hated my father.

I loved him.

I hated him through love.

Toothless did not stir, or disturb the chief during this hesitant confession. He only listened, as was expected of him.

Stoick hesitated one moment more to collect his thoughts and then made himself speak again, "Well, that was the moment I promised myself that I'd do my best to be... a... differen_t parent", he said, rubbing the side of his chest.

His rib still hurt as he stroked it softly, even after all those years. So many years.

"Better, gentler, wiser."

He poked a bit at the fire.

"So I told him I would be the one to teach my son. My father accepted that, though I never told him I intended to raise my son my way."

I lied to him, for the first and last time in my life

And Stoick had lived true to his word. He had never raise a hand against his son. Vikings life was only worth as much as their honour, after all, and a Viking never broke his promises.

"Valhallarama left this world a bit later after that," he continued, appearing detached from the words. "She died just after my father did. As if on cue, or like they were in a hurry, everybody was leaving me. And in spite of all my good intentions, I really wound up not doin' anythin' for my boy. I want to think that I did everythin' I could, but in the end, he didn't need me."

Stoick' s head raised and he locked eyes with the Night Fury before him.

"In the end, all he needed was a dragon..."

He stirred again at the half-burned logs in the fire.

"...not me," he whispered. "Well, beast, good night to ya", Stoick said curtly, and left for his bed.

A pair of toxic-green eyes stared at the fire, long after Stoick was gone, listening to the flames.

Stoick did not sleep well, too busy listening to memories.

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><p>"You want to know a secret, bud? I always wanted to be like my father," Hiccup revealed to Toothless, lying against the scaled chest by the lake in the cove where they had met for the first time.<p>

" I mean... I used to", he corrected himself, ashamed of this sudden self-discovery.

The late autumn, with its empty tree-crowns, provided a still backdrop of the world as it prepared for its white slumber. Winter always made Hiccup more silent and contemplative, and lately he had a lot to think about. It was who he was. Not who he was raised to be, but rather the person he forged anew when he bonded with Toothless.

"Is it normal for a child to not want to be like his parent?" he asked rhetorically.

Toothless listened. Four years had passed since the Red Death has been slain. The boy had grown into a men. He was still scrawny and a bit on the short side, although enormously respected.

"It should be the opposite...it ought to be", Hiccup let out a misty stream of breath, trying to convince himself as colourful

>leaves slowly fell from the trees around the cove, "My father was-is-", he bit his lip, suddenly unsure of himself.<p>

He had not felt that way about himself since he met the majestic Night Fury for the first time.

"My father- he's- important to me", he decided to say, "He- he always was, but..."

There were always 'buts' for Hiccup, and he had taught himself how to deal with them. Sometimes he was jealous of people who had such a rigid world view that their self-confidence and conviction was as rigid as the Vikings' will itself.

Then he thought about his father, and he wasn't sure about that anymore.

"Since I remember, Dad raised me alone. My mom was gone; he was all I had. And I know - I understand now - how hard it must've been for him to try and tolerate my... uniqueness."

At that last word, Toothless snorted.

Hiccup rolled his eyes, "Okay, then, he tolerated my misguided tendency to blow things up. Happy now, you lazy reptile?"

The ebony dragon withheld from further commentary.

Hiccup scratched the short beard he was growing on his chin. That scruffy thing was bothersome and he preferred being clean shaven, but he'd finally decided to grow his beard out since it kept his face warm.

"He tried, Toothless. And I know I'm selfish for saying this, but his trying just wasn't enough!"

Hiccup was almost shouting now, angry at himself. "I know part of it was my fault. I was small and weak and I tried too hard to prove my

>worth. I know Dad tried his best, in his own way. Some of it was my fault and - and - but there was his fault there, too. But -"

Hiccup clenched his eyes, gripped his fists and then let go of the frustration inside before he spoke again.

"I thought a lot about it, both as a child and even more as an adult. Dad had made his decision about me, even though it made his heart hurt. But much as I appreciate him, as much as I love him, I know I don't want my children to experience the things I did!"

Hiccup looked up, into the sky, emotionally drained. He had never spoken his doubts aloud before, hearing in his mind the clangour of chains and his ankles squeezed beneath the shackles and the deep, unforgiving voice.

"You're not one of us. You're not my son."

It was in the past but it still hurt, the cold air unable to freeze and numb the hot pressure in his chest.

"Astrid," he took a steady breath, " Astrid just told me she's pregnant," Hiccup said with difficulty to Toothless.

Only a gentle rustling of leaves rolling by the pond's edge disturbed the silence which followed.

"I'm afraid, bud. I'm afraid of repeating my Dad's mistakes. "

The young man and Night Fury both remained quiet. Hiccup felt himself being comforted by the warm soundlessness. Toothless let the wind tell the human the answers he needed, the quiet, gentle late autumn zephyr serving as the dragon's voice.

* * *

><p>With a loud peal of laughter, he tackled the dragon. Toothless accepted the defeat. With a not-so-graceful roll onto his back, and with a lolled out tongue, he fell into the long, green spring grass.</p>

"Take that, beast!" The boy, at the young and utterly hyperactive age of eight, exclaimed proudly about this great achievement, "Gimcrack Horrendous Haddock wins again!"

"Gimmy, are you playing 'Slay-the-Dragon' again?" A deep voice

sounded from across the meadow.

"No, Daddy! Just... playing!" The boy shouted with a gap-toothed grin.

He shot his panicked green eyes to the inert heap of scales, "Come on, Toothless, back me up!" He hissed to the slain dragon who remained still as a perfect actor should.

The boy already heard steps nearing. "I'll give you fish later!"

Hiccup, now a bit more advanced in years, stepped onto the scene. He took in the most adorable sign of his son hugging the dragon lovingly. The Night Fury purred in contentment.

"Enough play-time for today. Come along; your grandfather wants us to eat dinner together. It's rude to keep our elders waiting. I'm totally sure the flea-bag over there will be fine for five minutes without an embrace", Hiccup said with a knowing smile.

Toothless snorted, not amused.

"Everythin' all right there, Hiccup? I heard a scream," Stoick said as he approached his kin. He was still a prime example of a warrior and leader, despite his advanced age.

"Nothing, dad. Just Gimmy playing with Toothless", Berk's first dragon rider answered and met his father's eyes.

They looked at each other in silence. Whenever Dad and Grandpa met, it was full of long pauses and heaviness that the young boy did not like. Suddenly the youngling felt a nudge on his back.

"What?! I'll give you some fish, I promise!" He whined back. He bobbed his red-haired head closer to Toothless, who nuzzled him again with a distinct bark-growl followed by a few hiss-trills.

Hiccup and Stoick had already started walking back to the village, the younger one with a slight limp. They walked alongside each other, yet never together.

There was a space between them, there was something missing.

Gimcrack looked back at Toothless who gazed back into his eyes with intensity the child had never seen before. The boy's mouth hung open for a moment before he snapped it shut, nodded and ran as much as his little legs allowed.

Hiccup and Stoick both felt something warm their palms. They barely had time to react as the boy swung himself using Hiccup's right hand and Stoick's left hand for balance.

"Dad, I know who I want to be when I grow up!" The boy announced proudly as he made a barely-graceful landing back to the ground.

"Oh, tell me, who?" Hiccup asked with curiosity.

"I want to be smart and say what I think like you, Dad!" Gimcrack

shouted with
>childish honesty.<p>

And then to the surprise of both men, his head turned to Stoick, " And I want to be as strong and big as Grandpa! I have the >best dad and grandfather. Ever!" He yelled and tried swinging himself again.

"Swing me, swing me!" Grimcrack demanded when none of his elders answered.

The child could not comprehend why his father looked at his own parent with a smile which appeared both happy and painful. He also did not understand why Stoick wore his usual grim expression but had lively, shiny eyes.

The boy did not understand; however, he thought it was something important.

Toothless looked on from afar as the men recovered from the moment and walked away in cacophony of gleeful whooping and squeals as the child was swung high in the air.

Hiccup and Stoick still walked in a distance from each other. However, the gap was now much smaller than before.

The Night Fury took a deep breath of the fresh, romantic spring air and trotted up to walk by Hiccup's side. Close, always close.

That's where his place was.

* * *

><p>AN: Here it is. My another shot at drama. As always I write about a problem. I wonder if my readers feels about their parents. As Stoick, as Hiccup, or as Gimmy. There comes a time in life, for some sooner for some later, when you need to evaluate your upbringing. Especially if you think about what are you going to show your kids. I hope you've enjoyed this short story. I'll be back with more of "The Truth is a Shard of Ice" later. Cheers.

**Big thank you to my editors for this piece Fjord Mustang and anhedral!
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End
file.